United Nations A/69/76

General Assembly

Distr.: General
8 April 2014

Original: English

Sixty-ninth session
Item 19 of the preliminary list*
Sustainable development

Follow-up to the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General hereby transmits a letter from the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) forwarding the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development as follow-up to the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development after 2014 (see annex).

* A/69/50.

14-29378 (E) 110414

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Annex

Letter dated 6 March 2014 from the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization addressed to the Secretary-General

At its thirty-seventh session, the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) endorsed the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development as follow-up to the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development after 2014 and requested me to bring it to the attention of the General Assembly at its sixty-ninth session, for its consideration as a concrete contribution to the post-2015 development agenda and for its appropriate action (see paragraph 4 of enclosure 1, 37C/Resolution12).

The Global Action Programme was developed in consultation with all education for sustainable development stakeholders, with particular focus being put on actions on the ground and on the identification of policymakers, institutional leaders, youth, educators and local authorities as priority target and participating groups. The Global Action Programme will be the major contribution of UNESCO to the implementation of paragraph 233 on education for sustainable development contained in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex), held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2012. As you are aware, the Rio implementation matrix, transmitted with your letter of 2 August 2012, lists UNESCO as the lead for the follow-up on paragraph 233. We plan to launch the Global Action Programme at the UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development, to be held in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, from 10 to 12 November 2014.

I should appreciate it if you could kindly circulate the attached resolution and the text of the Programme to the members of the General Assembly, for their consideration and appropriate action (see enclosures).

(*Signed*) Irina **Bokova**

Enclosure 1

37C/Resolution12

Follow-up of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development post-2014 — Global Action Programme

The General Conference,

Taking note of 190 EX/Decision 9 and 192 EX/Decision 6,

Also taking note of the strong support expressed by the Executive Board for the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and its five priority action areas,

Having examined the proposal for a Global Action Programme on ESD as follow-up to the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development after 2014 (37 C/57),

1. *Endorses* the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development;

2. *Recognizes* the need for strong political support for the successful implementation of the Global Action Programme on ESD;

3. *Encourages* ministers of Member States and heads of United Nations agencies to participate in the UNESCO World Conference on ESD, which will review the implementation of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development and discuss further promotion of ESD;

4. *Requests* the Director-General to bring the Global Action Programme on ESD to the attention of the United Nations General Assembly at its 69th session (2014) for consideration and appropriate action;

5. *Also requests* the Director-General to mobilize all UNESCO programme sectors and networks to enhance their contribution to ESD and engage with the preparations for the implementation of the Global Action Programme;

6. *Emphasizes* the need for collaboration and partnership with other relevant United Nations agencies and especially the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on sustainable consumption and production;

Invites Member States to support the adoption of the Global Action Programme by the United Nations General Assembly as a concrete contribution to the post-2015 development agenda.

Enclosure 2

Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development as follow-up to the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development after 2014

I. Introduction

1. Sustainable development cannot be achieved by political agreements, financial incentives or technological solutions alone. Sustainable development requires changes in the way we think and act. Education plays a crucial role in bringing about this change. Action at all levels is therefore required to fully mobilize the potential of education for sustainable development and enhance learning opportunities for sustainable development for all. The Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development intends to generate this action. The present document provides the framework for the Global Action Programme.

2. The important role of education in sustainable development has long been recognized. Improving and reorienting education is one of the goals of Agenda 21, which was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, chapter 36 of which is dedicated to "Promoting Education, Public Awareness and Training". Reorienting education towards sustainable development has been the focus of many initiatives under the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), which was declared following the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002. Education is, furthermore, part of the major three so-called Rio Conventions, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992), the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (1994).

3. In The Future We Want, the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex), held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2012, Member States agreed "to promote education for sustainable development and to integrate sustainable development more actively into education beyond the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development". The Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development responds to this agreement and provides the follow-up to the United Nations Decade. It has been developed on the basis of broad consultations and input from a wide range of stakeholders. As a follow-up to the United Nations Decade, it is at the same time intended as a concrete, tangible contribution to the post-2015 agenda.

4. The United Nations Decade has been successful in raising awareness regarding education for sustainable development, mobilized stakeholders across the globe, created a platform for international collaboration, influenced policies and contributed to the coordination of stakeholders at the national level, and generated large amounts of concrete good practice projects in all areas of education and learning. At the same time, considerable challenges remain: successful activities in education for sustainable development often merely operate within fixed time frames and with limited budgets; education for sustainable development policies and practices are often not properly linked; and education for sustainable development has yet to complete its integration into the mainstream of the education and

sustainable development agendas. Furthermore, sustainable development challenges have acquired even more urgency since the beginning of the Decade and new concerns have come to the fore, such as the need to promote global citizenship. Consequently, a scaling-up of education for sustainable development actions is required.

II. Principles

5. The Global Action Programme encompasses policies and practices on education for sustainable development. Education for sustainable development in the context of this Global Action Programme is understood to adhere to the following principles:

(a) Education for sustainable development allows every human being to acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that empower them to contribute to sustainable development and take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability, and a just society for present and future generations;

(b) Education for sustainable development entails including key sustainable development issues in teaching and learning and requires innovative, participatory teaching and learning methods that empower and motivate learners to take action for sustainable development. Education for sustainable development promotes skills such as critical thinking, understanding complex systems, imagining future scenarios, and making decisions in a participatory and collaborative way;

(c) Education for sustainable development is grounded in a rights-based approach to education. It is concerned with the provision of quality education and learning that is relevant today;

(d) Education for sustainable development is transformative education in that it is aimed at reorienting societies towards sustainable development. This, ultimately, requires a reorientation of education systems and structures as well as a reframing of teaching and learning. Education for sustainable development concerns the core of teaching and learning and cannot be considered an add-on to existing educational practices;

(e) Education for sustainable development relates to the environmental, social and economic pillars of sustainable development in an integrated, balanced and holistic manner. It equally relates to a comprehensive sustainable development agenda as contained in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which includes, among others, the interrelated issues of poverty reduction, climate change, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity and sustainable consumption and production. It responds to local specificities and respects cultural diversity;

(f) Education for sustainable development encompasses formal, non-formal and informal education and lifelong learning from early childhood to old age. It therefore also encompasses training and public awareness activities within wider efforts towards sustainable development;

(g) Education for sustainable development, the term used for this Global Action Programme, is intended to encompass all activities that are in line with the

above principles irrespective of whether they themselves use the term "education for sustainable development" or — depending on their history, cultural context or specific priority areas — environmental education, sustainability education, global education, development education, or other.

III. Goal and objectives

6. The overall goal of the Global Action Programme is to generate and scale up action in all levels and areas of education and learning to accelerate progress towards sustainable development. This goal is further declined into two objectives, the first relating directly to the education sector and the second extending beyond that sector:

(a) To reorient education and learning so that everyone has the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that empower them to contribute to sustainable development;

(b) To strengthen education and learning in all agendas, programmes and activities that promote sustainable development.

IV. Priority action areas

7. The Global Action Programme focuses on five priority action areas in order to enable strategic focus and stakeholder commitment. These action areas, which build on successes, challenges and "unfinished business" of the United Nations Decade, are considered key leverage points to advance the education for sustainable development agenda. While education for sustainable development action at all levels and in all areas of education and sustainable development is encouraged, action under this Global Action Programme focuses in particular on the following areas and strategic objectives:

Policy support

Integrate education for sustainable development into international and national policies in education and sustainable development

8. An enabling policy environment is crucial for mobilizing education and learning for sustainable development and for the scaling up of education for sustainable development action in formal, non-formal and informal education and learning. Relevant and coherent policies should be grounded in participatory processes and designed through interministerial and intersectoral coordination, also involving civil society, the private sector, academia and local communities. Creating an enabling policy environment, which must be properly linked to implementation, requires in particular the following:

(a) Education for sustainable development is systematically integrated into education policies that cover the education sector as a whole or a subset of the sector. This includes the integration of education for sustainable development into curricula and into national quality standards and indicator frameworks that establish standards for learning outcomes. It also includes integrating education for sustainable development as an important element of international education agendas;

(b) Education for sustainable development is systematically integrated into policies relevant to key sustainable development challenges. This includes reflecting the role of education and learning in national policies related to the three Rio Conventions, in line with the important role the Conventions ascribe to communication, education, training and public awareness. It includes integrating education for sustainable development into relevant international agendas in sustainable development;

(c) Education for sustainable development is a systematic element of bilateral and multilateral development cooperation frameworks.

Whole-institution approaches

Promote whole-institution approaches to education for sustainable development at all levels and in all settings

9. Whole-institution, or institution-wide, approaches require not only the reorientation of teaching content and methodology, but also campus and facility management that is in line with sustainable development as well as the cooperation of the institution with sustainable development stakeholders in the community. Particular successes in this regard can be found in the areas of higher education and secondary schools. These need to be scaled up and expanded to other levels and types of education, including early childhood care and education, technical and vocational education and training and the non-formal education of youth and adults. The promotion of whole-institution approaches requires in particular the following:

(a) An institution-wide process is organized in a manner that enables all stakeholders — leadership, teachers, learners, administration — to jointly develop a vision and plan to implement education for sustainable development in the whole institution;

(b) Technical and, where possible and appropriate, financial support is provided to the institution to support its reorientation. This can include the provision of relevant good practice examples, training for leadership and administration, the development of guidelines, as well as associated research;

(c) Existing relevant inter-institutional networks are mobilized and enhanced in order to facilitate mutual support such as peer-to-peer learning on a whole-institution approach and to increase the visibility of the approach to promote it as a model for adaptation.

Educators

Strengthen the capacity of educators, trainers and other change agents to become learning facilitators for education for sustainable development

10. Educators are one of the most important levers to foster educational change and to facilitate learning for sustainable development. There is therefore an urgent need to build the capacity of educators, as well as trainers and other change agents, on relevant issues related to sustainable development and appropriate teaching and learning methodologies. This requires in particular the following:

(a) Education for sustainable development is integrated into pre-service and in-service education and training for early childhood, primary and secondary school teachers, as well as teachers and facilitators in non-formal and informal education.

This may start with the inclusion of education for sustainable development in specific subject areas but will ultimately lead to the integration of education for sustainable development as a cross-cutting issue. It includes education for sustainable development training for head teachers;

(b) Education for sustainable development is integrated into the pre-service and in-service education and training of teachers and trainers in technical and vocational education and training. This includes building capacities on sustainable consumption and production modalities as well as skills for green jobs;

(c) Education for sustainable development is integrated into faculty training in higher education institutions to enhance capacity in teaching sustainability issues, conducting and supervising solution-oriented interdisciplinary research, and informing policymaking on education for sustainable development and sustainable development;

(d) Sustainable development perspectives including, for example, resource efficiency and social and corporate responsibility, are integrated in an enhanced manner into postgraduate education, capacity-building and training of decision-makers, public sector personnel, members of the business sector, media and development professionals, and other sectoral and thematic specialists relevant to sustainable development. This includes, among others, "train-the-trainers" education for sustainable development programmes, the integration of education for sustainable development into executive education, and the alignment of in-house training programmes for private company staff with education for sustainable development.

Youth

Support youth in their role as change agents for sustainable development through education for sustainable development

11. Youth have a high stake in shaping a better future for themselves and generations after. Moreover, today, youth are increasingly the drivers of the educational process, especially in non-formal and informal learning. Supporting youth in their role as change agents through education for sustainable development requires in particular the following:

(a) Learner-centred non-formal and informal learning opportunities in education for sustainable development for youth are enhanced. This includes developing and enhancing e-learning and mobile learning opportunities in education for sustainable development;

(b) Participatory skills that empower youth to act as change agents in global, national and local sustainable development processes become a specific focus of formal and non-formal education programmes within and outside education for sustainable development.

Local communities

Accelerate the search for sustainable development solutions at the local level through education for sustainable development

12. Effective and innovative solutions to sustainable development challenges are frequently developed at the local level. Multi-stakeholder dialogue and cooperation,

for example, among local governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, the media, education and research institutions and individual citizens, play a key role in this regard. Education for sustainable development supports multi-stakeholder learning and community engagement and links the local to the global. The full mobilization of education and learning for sustainable development calls for enhanced action at the local level. This requires in particular the following:

(a) Local networks that facilitate multi-stakeholder learning for sustainable development are developed, operationalized and enhanced. This includes the diversification and expansion of existing networks, so that new and more stakeholders are integrated, including indigenous communities;

(b) Local authorities and governments enhance their role in providing learning opportunities for sustainable development. This includes, as appropriate, supporting, at the local level, the integration of education for sustainable development into formal education, as well as the provision of, and support to, non-formal and informal learning opportunities in sustainable development for all members of the community.

V. Implementation

13. The Global Action Programme is expected to be implemented at the international, regional, subregional, national, subnational and local levels. All relevant stakeholders are encouraged to develop activities under the five priority action areas. Responsibility lies in particular with Member State Governments, civil society organizations, the private sector, the media, the academic and research community, education and other relevant institutions that facilitate and support learning, individual teachers and learners, and intergovernmental organizations. Contributions are expected both from education and sustainable development stakeholders. Responding to requests for a light organizational structure at the international level and flexibility regarding implementation and target-setting at the national level, the Global Action Programme will be implemented mainly in a decentralized manner.

14. In order to facilitate implementation, key partners for each of the five priority action areas of the Global Action Programme will be identified and commitments will be solicited regarding specific activities under each priority action area. These activities, which should have concrete timelines and targets, are expected to serve as catalysts for further activities by other actors. A coordination forum for key partners under each priority action area will be established. Research on education for sustainable development will be mobilized to support advances under each priority action area. This includes research on innovative approaches to education for sustainable development.

15. Building on the experiences of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, the establishment of national coordination mechanisms is encouraged, or, as appropriate, the continuation of successful mechanisms that were put in place under the Decade. Each Member State is invited to designate a national focal point. A coordination mechanism among United Nations agencies will be maintained. Through inter-agency and further relevant mechanisms, full coherence with other relevant international processes and agendas will be sought in implementing the Global Action Programme.

16. A secretariat will be maintained by UNESCO, to be confirmed by the General Assembly, whose major functions will be: facilitating the implementation of the Global Action Programme through partnerships; monitoring progress at the global level; and providing a clearinghouse of key actors and successful practices.

17. There exists a recognized need to properly resource activities on education for sustainable development. At the same time, and given that education for sustainable development is not an add-on agenda but cuts across education and sustainable development concerns, there is considerable potential to mobilize funding for education for sustainable development from existing funding mechanisms in education and sustainable development. Donors are encouraged to consider the compatibility of education for sustainable development with existing funding mechanisms. Education for sustainable development stakeholders are encouraged to fully and systematically use the existing potential. Furthermore, considerable potential exists in the development of new partnerships, including with the private sector, to support the implementation of the Global Action Programme.

18. The implementation of the Global Action Programme will be regularly monitored. A reporting mechanism will be developed that takes into account the need for evidence-based monitoring, including specific targets and benchmarks, the need for impact-oriented reporting, the different nature of activities that are expected under each action area, and the decentralized implementation of this Global Action Programme which concerns a wide range of stakeholders. The development of evaluation mechanisms at the national, subnational and local levels will be encouraged, as appropriate, and the development of indicators will be sought. Reporting on the Global Action Programme may include alternative monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

19. The Global Action Programme is expected to be launched at the UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development in 2014, which will be held in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan. The Global Action Programme will be established for an initial period of five years, after which it will be reviewed for eventual extension. At that time, the priority action areas may be revised, depending on evolving needs.